Post 6/13/67

Radio and Television

Scripters Stymied By Pressure Groups

By Bob Thomas

HOLLYWOOD (AP)—A top television writer says that he and his fellow craftsmen "are being painted into a corner by self-censorship due to the cumulative effect of pressure groups." The latest hazard, says scripter Norman Jolley, is the American Italian Anti-Defamation League, for which Frank Sinatra recently became national chairman.

The networks' acquiescence to pressure groups has long rankled writers. They have said that they can't deal with reality because of orders not to offend any group. Businessmen object when an executive is portrayed as a villain; the same is true of doctors, Orientals, Indians, teachers, etc.

Jolley, author of 1200 teleplays and currently writer for "The FBI," explained:

"The function of the writer is to hold a mirror up to nature. If he can't present the truth as he sees it, then he will be showing a distored image."

Jolley's plaint was prompted by his experience with a two-part script he researched and wrote on the Cosa Nostra for "The FBI."

Titled "The Executioners," it was presented March 12 and 19 on ABC. Besides star Efrem Zimbalist, the show featured Walter Pidgeon, Telly Savalas, Celeste Holm and Susan Strasberg. Jolley pointed out that not one actor of Italian derivation was cast, and only one Italian name, Clemente, was used in the script.

Jolley said that after the second segment was shown, the sponsor—Ford—received a telegram from New York Civil Court Judge Ross J. Dilorenzo, president of the American Italian Anti-Defamation League.

He questioned the veracity of the script and added:

"If pure fabrication it would constitute outright defamation of many thousands of American-Italian college students—the villain was a collegiate who killed for the Mafia—and violation of FCC regulations.

"In the name of 22 million American-Italians in the United States, we resent vehemently this type of program that slanders the decent, law-abiding citizens of an important ethnic group. We have been flooded with angry protests from many members."

The Italian group (it has been sued by the Jewish Anti-Defamation League for infringement on the name (was formed in the spring of 1966. Among its purposes: to fight discrimination; to point up contributions to this country—"an Italian discovered America-Christopher Columbus!"; to eradicate "unwarranted accusations and impression that crime is the exclusive province of American-Italians."

The board includes civic, business and labor leaders, plus former champion boxer Rocky Marciano and ex-mayor of New York, Vincent R. Impelliterri. Recently Frank Sinatra accepted the national chairmanship with the statement that "any form of discrimination is un-American."

In answer to Judge Dilorenzo's protest, Jolley declared that "The Executioners" script was based on 15 different FBI cases, "with the names and incidents changed to protect the guilty." He added:"We're at war now —with La Cosa Nostra. Will the A.I.D. stand up and be counted in this war — as the American-Italians did in World War II."

The writer charged that a U.S. representative and senator joined the pressure campaign and as a result "The Executioners" was removed from he summer re-run schedule on ABC.